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ABSTRACT

This paper is designed to help parents in laying a solid foundation of learning experiences for their child with learning disabilities. It introduces three strategies, a rationale, and examples for each strategy that may help parents promote future school success for their child with learning disabilities. The first strategy urges parents to create a sound foundation of experiences early in the child's life that will empower him or her to learn. Examples given include letting a child help in grocery shopping, going to the post office, driving to some destination, or organizing a room in the home. The second strategy suggests immersing a child of any age into a literacy environment as much and as often as possible, by reading at night to the child, reading several times a day, reading a book related to real life situations, and creating a book with a child. The last strategy proposes encouraging children with learning disabilities to experience play and recreation with other children before attending school. Parents are urged to allow their child to become involved in a sport, join a group of children on an outing, and take part in play dates. (CR)

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Running head: PROMOTING SCHOOL SUCCESS FOR CHILDREN

Parents Promoting School Success for Young Children With Learning Disabilities

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Abstract

This paper is intended to aid parents in laying a solid foundation of learning experiences for their child with learning disabilities. This article introduces three strategies, a rationale and examples for each strategy that may help parents promote future school success for their young child with learning disabilities. Parents who practice these types of strategies with their children may experience a smoother transition from home to preschool and kindergarten for themselves and their children. Contains 6 references.

Parents Promoting School Success for Young Children With Learning Disabilities

Young children are eager to learn yet not all children succeed in school. A child's earliest learning experiences should lay the foundation for future success in school and adult life. In order to accomplish this, early childhood experiences must promote children's physical development, social maturity, emotional adjustment, and cognitive capacities (Dept. of Education, 1991). To ensure appropriate developmental experiences for their children, parents should become aware of the proper steps they should take with their young child with learning disabilities.

Parents are critical to the development of young children and their educational success. The concept of school readiness, while focusing attention on those years just prior to formal schooling, incorporates the critical periods of growth from birth to about the age of eight. During this time, children are primarily socialized and educated by their families and caregivers, and by the opportunities they have to explore the world (Dept. of Education, 1991). Not only do parents have to look at skills that are mastered, they also need to look at and find out why certain skills are not being mastered. Every parent must become a diagnostician to identify and meet the needs of at-risk children early enough to prevent serious problems. All children deserve a good start in school, however, some children need extra help to facilitate their learning and development so that they can reach their potential (Peltzman, 1992).

The purpose of this article is to introduce strategies that may help parents promote future school success for their young child with learning disabilities. The early intervention activities that parents can utilize and the enrollment in an early intervention program are two of the most promising ways to help at-risk children (Peltzman, 1992). Three strategies will be described that can be implemented by parents in practicing age appropriate activities with their child. Each strategy discusses a rationale and illustrates some examples from a variety of accepted early childhood disciplines.

Strategy 1: Create a sound foundation of experiences early in the child's life that will empower him or her to learn.

Rationale. During the early years the initial patterns of learning set the pace for, and influence the nature of all subsequent development. Intelligence and other human capacities are not fixed at birth but, rather, are shaped to some extent by environmental influences and through learning (Peltzman, 1992). The more learning experiences that a child has before entering school, the more prepared that child will be to absorb new information that he or she will be introduced to at school.

Examples. Including a young child in day-to-day activities is a great way for parents to expose children to their very first learning experiences. Some of these activities may include grocery shopping, going to the post office, driving to some destination or simply organizing a room in the home. The ways that parents can use these simple activities to teach their children are:

1. Before going grocery shopping with a child, the parent should prepare a list of groceries that will be needed at home. The child can help look into the cupboards and refrigerator for items that are missing. Then the parent can

write down some of the child's suggestions. The parent is demonstrating to the child how useful writing can be in the real world. Both child and parent should refer back to the list of groceries as they are walking up and down the aisles of the store. The parent may want to draw some simple pictures next to the items on the grocery list for the very young child. This way the child can be involved in the process as an active participant. The child will be able to read the grocery list by him or herself by following the pictures and will not just watch the parent write and read everything for the child. This shows the child that just because he or she has a disability does not mean that he or she can not do the same things as everyone else.

2. Mailing a letter at the post office can be a rich literacy activity for the child to be a part of. The many steps of addressing an envelope, applying a stamp, and going to the actual mailbox or post office can be educating for children. This is an activity that will be taught to the child later in school and used throughout life. The idea of organized writing such as where the address goes on an envelope can be very difficult concepts for a child with learning disabilities. This activity is pre-exposing the child to the organizational skills that he or she will encounter in school.
3. The act of following directions is a very important tool for a child, especially one who is learning disabled, to have. A parent can introduce this exercise to the child when driving to school or to some other destination. Both parent and child should go over the written directions as they refer to a simple map of the streets that are familiar to him or her. The directions should be verbalized as

the parent actually drives on the specific streets. This exercise will introduce early map skills as well as familiarize the child with his/her local neighborhood.

4. Children with learning disabilities, especially, may have some problems with organizational skills. An ideal way to expose a child to good organizational skills early on is during clean up time at home. A parent can start organizing the child's toys and make sure that the child follows through with the organizational method created. It is important that the parent does not change the arrangement of the toys often.

These examples are simple and easy to use for parents. The examples mentioned above are also valuable for the child because he/she will be using the skills gained from these activities in school and throughout life.

Strategy 2: Immerse a child of any age into a literacy environment as much and as often as possible.

Rationale. Learning to read begins well before the first day of school. When parents tell nursery rhymes to babies, they are beginning to teach them to read. They are helping the baby to hear the similarities and differences in the sounds of words (Unknown, 1996). Reading to young children forms a foundation of learning that will help them with future reading they will face in school. Research has demonstrated that children who are introduced to books at an early age tend to develop sophisticated language structures and concepts about conventions found in books. By repeatedly reading the same books, children begin to develop an understanding of the conventions of print found in books such as directionality (left to right, up to down), the role of print and

pictures in telling the story, the concepts of "letters" and "words," punctuation, and so forth (Ellis, 1994). Before children can begin reading or writing in school they have to be exposed to all aspects of the subject. Children follow natural developmental stages of reading and writing even before they are formally taught. Young children begin to scribble, then draw, and eventually learn to hold a pencil instead of a crayon and write down actual words.

Examples. Creating a literate environment for a child with learning disabilities is more significant to the child's future education than parents realize. Children with learning disabilities need as much preparation for future reading as possible. This also gives parents an opportunity to be a part of their child's primary education. Some activities such as reading at night to children, reading several times a day, reading a book that relates to a real life situation for the child, and creating a book with a child can help introduce the importance of literacy to children. The following activities can help parents promote literacy for their children:

1. Reading at night to children demonstrates that the act of reading can be an enjoyable as well as ongoing process. Parents can begin reading from a book that contains a collection of nursery rhymes, choosing a different nursery rhyme every night. The child will enjoy the quality time alone with the parent and may begin asking the parent to be read to. The parent is also exposing the child to the different types of language that exist in text. This can be especially helpful for a child with learning disabilities.
2. By having the child observe a parent reading a newspaper in the morning, or a good book in the evening, the parent is modeling that reading is enjoyable. A

nice activity would be establishing quiet time on Sundays, for example, where the parents sit down to read their books and the child selects his or her own book to read. Parents are very influential models for children. If parents read themselves, children will want to sit and read themselves too. The more a child with learning disabilities attempts to read and follow pictures and text in a book, the more he or she will be prepared to go to the next step and read.

3. A good way to connect reading to real life situations for a child would be to read a book about something that is actually happening in that child's life. One example is reading a book that discusses the same type of disability that the child has. Some children may feel different or alone if they have a learning disability. Knowing that someone else has the same problem may help make the child feel more secure in dealing with his or her own disability.
4. Since parents are a child's first teacher, they could use this opportunity to expose children to pre-writing skills. Children who are learning disabled may have different or lagging motor skills than other children. Therefore, they may need more help or more practice with holding a crayon or concentrating on a certain activity. Parents can create a book with their young child which can give children a feeling of ownership of their learning. The child may think of a story or a theme with the parent, and then draw pictures that will tell their story on consecutive sheets of construction paper. Depending on the age appropriate, the parent can write what the child wants to say below his or her picture. After the parent collates the pages, the child will see a book that he or she created. According to Ellis(1994), preschool children with disabilities are

able to demonstrate behaviors associated with emerging literacy, when structured opportunities to interact within meaningful, literacy-rich environments are provided.

Strategy 3. Children with learning disabilities need to experience play and recreation with other children before attending school.

Rationale. As children grow, they rely on three major systems of support: their family, their school, and their peer group. All three of these systems contribute to the growth of an individual, even when one or more are not working as well as the others. For a child with learning disabilities, making friends with some of the people around him or her may be the most difficult task of all (Ripley & Cvach, 1989). Parents believe that they have a responsibility to care for their child by providing food, shelter and nurture. Sometimes parents forget that a child's social growth is just as, if not more, important. Parents have to realize that children with learning disabilities may have more problems socially than with anything else. Therefore, parents have to take proper as well as age appropriate measures to help their child develop a feeling of acceptance and belonging when he or she will attend school.

Examples. There are several resources available to parents that can help them find an appropriate social activity in which they can enroll their child. Parents have to give their children as much experiences socially as they do academically. Some ways parents can accomplish this is by allowing their child to become involved in a sport, join a group of children on an outing, or take part in play dates.

1. It has been found that some children, who have learning disabilities and do not do so well in academic areas, may excel in areas such as sports. If a parent

discovers a sport that their child is good at, they should have their child join a team. There are a lot of teams available for young children to join such as soccer and softball. Parents of children with learning disabilities should take the opportunity to highlight their child's abilities when they can. This can help the child feel as though he or she is good at something, and that he or she is just like other children. This is important to instill into the mind of a young child before he or she begins school. An important note is that parents have to make sure that their child is 'good' at that particular sport before joining a team. A child should not be given a chance to fail at something else. This child already knows that he or she is different.

2. The parent of a child with learning disabilities can plan outings, such as a trip to the children's museum, that would involve other children. Parents need to be there for children especially when they are facing their early social interactions. These can be tough sometimes for a child with learning disabilities and he or she may at first need a parent to be there to intervene. Other trips such as camping or exploring the outdoors may be ideal as well. These trips give children practice in being with other children, and their disabilities may be hidden when taking such trips.
3. Forming friendships for any child may be difficult. For the child with learning disabilities it may be more difficult especially when he or she goes to school. A child with learning disabilities may seem different to other children for many reasons. A parent can help diminish this difference if a child is given time to play with other children at home. This way the child with

learning disabilities has practice getting along with other children, and other children are given a chance to see that the child with learning disabilities is not that different.

Conclusion

The aforementioned strategies can be quite beneficial for young children with learning disabilities. Parents who practice these types of strategies with their young children may experience a smoother transition from home to preschool and kindergarten for themselves and their children. A preschool program can be especially advantageous for children with learning disabilities. It has been found that family-centered early intervention programs have become the "best practice" model for service delivery to young children with special needs and their families in the 90's (Sontag & Schacht, 1994). Parents should connect the experiences that their children have in school to the home by using the strategies mentioned.

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